(b) whether this aeroplane is also being modified for use by the Navy;

(c) if so, what are the reasons for the delay and

(d) how does the Navy plan to use this aircraft when it has never been used on an aircraft carrier before?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) The modernisation of MIG-21 BiS aircraft involved the complex task of integration of on-board systems of Western, Indian and Russian origin. This task was implemented in stages during the design and development phase. Delays in the programme occurred in the initial stages, due to customs related problems in Russia. In the subsequent stages of integration and flight testing, delays occurred in part due to problems relating to development and supply of Indian systems and integration of some western systems and in part, due to development problems of some Russian systems.

(d) The upgraded MiG-21 BiS aircraft is not being modified for use by the Indian Navy.

Purchase of Aircraft Carrier from Russia

5501. SHRI SHATRUGHAN SINHA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Navy planned to purchase the aircraft carrier "Admiral Gorshkov" and negotiations regarding this are at an advance stage;

(b) whether a team of Naval Officers visited Russia to inspect the aircraft carrier and had declared it unfit for purchase;

(c) whether the likely cost is expected to be more than Rs. 16,000 crores; and

(d) if so, what are Government's views on this?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (d) Admiral Gorshkov, an aircraft carrier, was inspected by the Naval officers in the past. The delegations sent for the purpose have recommended acquisition of the aircarft carrier.

The Government of Russian Federation have offered to gift Admiral Gorshkov to India. It will, however, require to be repaired, modified and modernized at the cost of the Indian Government before it can be inducted into service. The details in this regard are yet to be worked out.

Controversy regarding purchase of SU-30 Aircraft

5502. SHRI SHATRUGHAN SINHA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is controversy regarding purchase of SU-30 aircraft by the Indian Air Force;

(b) whether doubts have been expressed in the press on the suitability of buying such an air defence aircraft when the requirement of the Air Force was for a multi-role aircraft;

(c) the conversion of the SU-30 to Multi-role aircraft, if successful, will take over 10 years as such, this aircraft cannot fill the gap for the delay in the LCA;

(d) whether the MOD has asked CVC to look into this matter; and

(e) if so, what are Government's views on this?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) In certain news reports the choice of SU-30 aircraft has been questioned. The issue has also been raised in Parliament.

(b) SU-30 aircraft was purchased only after an evaluation by IAF specialists in Russia in 1994. A joint DRDO/ IAF team had carried out a study in November 1995 in which SU-30 emerged as the best of several options. The existing SU-30K is an Air Defence variant with limited multi-role capability. However, the contract signed with the Russians, stipulates development of the aircraft to be supplied in stages as SU-30K, SU-30 MKI-1, SU-30 MKI-2 and SU-30 MKI-3 standard, with multi-role capability.

(c) The Russian have indicated that delivery of SU-30 MK1-1 will commence in the last quarter of 2001. Based on this information, delivery of SU-30 MKI-3 is likely to take place in 2004.

(d) and (e) SU-30 contract is one of the many major Defence procurement contracts which have been referred to the CVC for investigation to find out if there was presence of agents, middlemen, middle companies after their presence in such deals was prohibited by the Government.